MARILLA TOO PROJECT

Cadillac-Manistee Ranger District
Huron-Manistee National Forests

Introduction

The Cadillac-Manistee Ranger District of the Huron-Manistee National Forests is proposing vegetative management activities in the Marilla Too Project on National Forest System lands within the Marilla Too Project Area (Project Area). The Marilla Too Project proposes the following activities: wildlife habitat improvement projects, including upland opening maintenance and snag creation; aspen and red pine timber harvest treatments; white pine planting; and non-native invasive plant species control.

Project Location

The Marilla Too Project Area is located on National Forest System (NFS) lands within the Cadillac-Manistee Ranger District of the Huron-Manistee National Forests (HMNF) in T22N, R 13W, Sections 2-9, 15-17, 19-22, and 28-30, Dickson Township; and T22N, R14W, Sections 1-4, 9-12, 16, 19-22, 25, and 28-30, Dickson Township; and T23N, R13W, Sections 31-35, Marilla Township; Manistee County, Michigan. The Marilla Too Project Area is divided into Compartments, including Compartments 404, 407- 413, 415, 416, 418, and 419. The Project Area contains approximately 19,757 acres, which includes approximately 13,160 acres of National Forest System lands and 6,597 acres of private land. The Project Area size and project activity acreages were estimated using Geographic Information System (GIS) acreage. The attached map displays the Project Area vicinity, Project Area boundary, roads and trails, and the location of the proposed treatments within the Marilla Too Project Area.

Management Direction

The Huron-Manistee National Forests' revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), provides a programmatic framework regarding allocation of land and the measures necessary to protect National Forest resources. The Forest Plan identifies goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines designed to accomplish the desired future condition for each Management Area (MA). The Marilla Too Project occurs within MAs 2.1, 2.1 G, 4.2, 4.2 G, 4.4, 6.1, and 8.1. The majority of the Project Area is located within MA 4.2 G and 2.1 G. Management directions for these areas are described in the Forest Plan standards and guidelines. The objectives of this project are that management activities would implement Forest Plan standards and guidelines along with addressing land management issues. The Purpose of these MAs as described in the Forest Plan includes the following:

- MA 2.1 – Roaded Natural Rolling Plains and Morainal Hills - Management activities provide high volumes of quality hardwood timber products and firewood with special consideration for enhancing wildlife habitats. Emphasis is given to managing deer, grouse and wildlife emphasis areas, and fish habitat. A broad variety of recreational opportunities is available and visual diversity is high.

  MA 2.1 G is a grouse emphasis area within MA 2.1 with an objective to manage intensively to provide quality grouse habitat. A portion of this project is located within the Marilla Grouse Management Area.

- MA 4.2 – Roaded Natural Sandy Plains and Hills - Management activities enhance and increase the variety of wildlife habitats with emphasis given to managing deer, grouse, wildlife and Kirtland's warbler essential habitat. High volumes of timber products are produced. Emphasis includes reducing life-threatening and property damaging wildfire potential and providing a variety of recreational opportunities.

  MA 4.2 G is a grouse emphasis area within MA 4.2 with an objective to manage intensively to provide quality grouse habitat. A portion of this project is located within the Marilla Grouse Management Area.

- MA 4.4 – Rural - Management activities provide recreational opportunities, sources of firewood close to users, and moderate to high volumes of softwood timber products. Emphasis includes reducing life-threatening and property-damaging wildfire potential. Wildlife management is coordinated with adjacent non-National Forest land management with emphasis on deer, grouse, and wildlife management. Some small blocks will be managed to protect isolated, essential areas for endangered, threatened, or sensitive species.

- MA 6.1 – Semiprimitive Nonmotorized Areas – Management activities in these areas provide for semiprimitive, nonmotorized recreational experiences and will reduce life-threatening and property-damaging wildfire potential. Areas support a wide variety of fish and wildlife species. Management enhances and improves habitats for species which avoid human activity.

  A portion of this project is located within the Manistee River Semiprimitive Nonmotorized Area; however, none of the proposed activities occur within the Semiprimitive Nonmotorized Area.

- MA 8.1 – Wild and Scenic Rivers - Management of the Congressionally-designated wild and scenic river corridors will protect unique areas that have outstandingly remarkable values such as scientific, biological, geological, historic or recreational characteristics of local, regional or national significance.

  A portion of this project is located within the Manistee National Recreational River; however, none of the proposed activities occur within the Wild and Scenic River.

A portion of the Project Area is located within the HMNF's old growth design; however, none of the proposed activities are in old growth stands. A portion the North Country National Scenic Trail and designated snowmobile trails are located within the Project Area; however, there are no trail projects proposed in this project. The proposed project activities described in the Proposed Action are consistent with the Forest Plan's management direction.

Purpose and Need

The Purpose and Need for a project is arrived at by addressing the differences between the existing condition and the desired condition. The Purpose and Need of the Marilla Too Project is to accomplish the following project objectives while meeting the goals and objectives of the Forest Plan for Management Areas 2.1, 2.1 G, 4.2, 4.2 G, 4.4, and 8.1:

❖ Provide early successional habitat, maintain the aspen forest type, and improve aspen age-class diversity

Existing Condition: Many of the aspen stands in the Project Area are over-mature and are gradually converting towards later successional species, such as maple, beech, and white ash. A

variety of tree species are encroaching on the existing upland openings within the Project Area, contributing to the gradual loss of shrubs and grasses needed by many game and non-game species.

Desired Condition: The aspen forest type and the early successional habitat it represents, is sustained within the Project Area. The vegetative composition of upland openings consists primarily of grasses, forbs, and berry-producing shrubs.

Need: There is a need to maintain the aspen forest type and improve aspen age class diversity and early successional habitat in the Project Area, especially for ruffed grouse habitat needs. There is a need to maintain upland openings to prevent the encroachment of tree species, and stimulate the growth of opening vegetation, berry-producing shrubs, and mast producing trees for wildlife habitat diversity.

- **Sustain forest and ecosystem health**

Existing Condition: Overstocked red pine stands are exhibiting reduced growth rates and are susceptible to insect and disease infestations. The overall vegetative and structural diversity in these stands is limited. Competition for sunlight, water, and nutrients is reducing the growth of the trees. Pine plantation stands are unnatural appearing and contain little horizontal and vertical diversity. Non-native, invasive plants, such as Japanese barberry, Canada thistle, autumn olive, leafy spurge, non-native bush honeysuckles, wild parsley, and Scotch pine have been identified within the Project Area.

Desired Condition: Red pine stands contain vegetative and structural diversity and grow near maximum rates and native vegetation is established in the understory. The pine plantations are healthy, have a natural appearance, and native herbaceous and shrub vegetation occurs in the understory. The presence and spread of non-native, invasive plants is limited.

Need: There is a need to open the canopy in the red pine stands in the Project Area to sustain forest health, concentrate growth on larger trees, minimize insect and disease attacks, improve wildlife habitat, enhance vegetative diversity, and improve stand and visual quality. There is a need to reduce current infestations and future spread of non-native, invasive plants.

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action identifies specific management activities that would be implemented to achieve the Purpose and Need objectives. The following lists the proposed actions to accomplish each project objective.

Project Objective - Provide early successional habitat, maintain the aspen forest type, and improve aspen age-class diversity

- Harvest aspen stands by clearcutting to optimize aspen regeneration, maintain the aspen forest type, and improve wildlife habitat for early successional species. The individual size of these clearcuts would not exceed 40 acres. Approximately 387 acres of aspen clearcutting is proposed. Approximately 25 acres of red pine adjacent to aspen stands is also proposed for clearcutting. This treatment would convert three small red pine stands to aspen forest type to increase the amount of aspen forest type and early successional habitat.

- Maintain existing upland openings by brushing, mowing, prescribed burning, apple tree pruning, and shrub planting to provide vegetative diversity, promote plant and animal habitat diversity, and promote native species. Approximately 235 acres of upland opening maintenance is proposed.

Project Objective - Sustain forest and ecosystem health

- Thin and/or regenerate red pine stands to provide current and future wood products, sustain forest health, reduce competition for sunlight, water, and soil nutrients, promote the establishment of hardwood regeneration, and improve wildlife habitat and visual diversity. The following treatments are proposed: approximately 567 acres of red pine thinning, 40 acres of red pine overstory removal, and 4 acres of snag creation in a red pine stand to improve cavity nester habitat.

- Non-native, invasive plant species are located in stands scattered across the Project Area. Treat non-native, invasive plant populations or individuals to reduce current infestations and future spread in order to sustain forest productivity. Proposed invasive plant control methods include manual and mechanical removal, and spot treatment with herbicide. Approximately ten invasive plant species in 30 stands totaling about ten acres (40 occurrences) are proposed for treatment.

- Conduct timber stand improvement/reforestation in three hardwood stands by underplanting additional white pine trees in the hardwood understory to improve the diversity of these stands and to fill in canopy gaps in these hardwood stands. Approximately 88 acres of white pine underplanting is proposed in three hardwood stands.

There are additional stands within the Project Area; however, we have limited this project to the activities that would be reasonable to complete in the next three to five years. **The Proposed Action is only one approach to meeting the Purpose and Need objectives for this project.** Using the comments received from this document, we may develop additional alternatives to the one proposed.

Potential Issues and Existing Resources

The following issues and resources have been discussed and/or evaluated in recent similar projects. Some may be determined to be minor, while others may be more affected by the project activities.

Wildlife and Management Indicator Species
The effects of the proposed activities on wildlife and Management Indicator Species will be evaluated as part of the analysis.

Vegetative Composition
The current vegetative composition and the expected changes as a result of implementing the proposed treatments will be evaluated as part of the analysis.

Soil, Watershed, and Air
Potential impacts to soil, watershed, and air resources will be evaluated as part of the analysis. Measures to minimize impacts to soil, watershed, and air resources will be incorporated into the project.

Heritage Resources and Endangered, Threatened, and Sensitive Species
Heritage resource sites and endangered, threatened and sensitive plant and animal species have been identified in the Project Area. Recommended protection measures for these resources will be incorporated into the design of the project.

Recreation and Visual Quality
Recreation within the Project Area includes hunting, hiking, skiing, snowmobiling, driving for pleasure, horseback riding, camping, and berry/mushroom picking. The analysis will evaluate how the proposed activities and the time of year they occur affect recreation activities, and the aesthetic quality in the Project Area.

Social Economics
The environmental analysis addresses the effects of the proposed vegetative treatments and transportation system on social economics and evaluates the cost-revenue of the alternatives.

Analysis Process

This analysis will follow the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) procedures and will be used to determine if there would be any significant environmental effects to the alternatives being considered. **The District Ranger, Jim A. Thompson, will use this analysis to decide whether or not to approve these activities on National Forest System lands or whether or not to prepare a more detailed Environmental Impact Statement.**

The following steps would be followed in developing the Environmental Assessment. The steps shown in *italics* are the formal opportunities for your involvement.

Step 1: Scoping December 2009 - January 2010
Public comment period. This is the time when people can comment on the proposed project, identify their issues and concerns, and recommend opportunities and options to consider in the analysis.
Forest Service develops issues based on comments from the public and then develops alternatives based on issues.

Step 2: Analysis January - April 2010
Forest Service analyzes the effects of alternatives and publishes an Environmental Assessment.
Public comment period (30 days) on Environmental Assessment.
Forest Service analyzes comments on the Environmental Assessment and responds (changes to the Environmental Assessment may be based on comments).

Step 3: Decision June 2010
District Ranger makes Decision and notifies the public.
Formal 45-day appeal period.

Step 4: Implementation 2010 and beyond
If the decision allows harvest activities to occur, timber sales would be prepared and sold over the next four to five years. The remaining project activities would likely be implemented during this same time frame, but may extend for about five years after the timber sale activities are completed.

Step 5: Monitoring 2010 and beyond
Monitoring of project implementation and effectiveness would take place during and after the implementation stage.

PUBLIC COMMENT SHEET

Marilla Too Project
Cadillac-Manistee Ranger District
Huron-Manistee National Forests

We invite you to comment on the specific proposed activities as they relate to the Marilla Too Project. Please take a few minutes to make comments on our proposal. The interdisciplinary team will review all of the comments and incorporate them into the planning process. If you would like to give input beyond the comment sheet, or have questions regarding the proposal, please contact Patricia O'Connell, at the Cadillac-Manistee Ranger District; Telephone: 231-723-2211 ext. 3119, Fax: 231-723-8642, email: poconnell@fs.fed.us.

NAME:_____
ADDRESS:_____
_____
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PHONE: _____

Please indicate your interest in this project by checking the appropriate box(s) below:

- ❑ I would like to receive a copy of the Environmental Assessment for this project.
- ❑ I do not wish to receive the Environmental Assessment or future information and mailings on this project.
- ❑ Please remove my name from all mailing lists.

Comments should be received by **January 15, 2010** to be used in alternative development for this project. **If you do not respond, we will assume you are not interested in this specific project and your name will be taken off the mailing list for this project.** However, your name will **remain** on other project mailing lists unless you indicate otherwise. **Note: If requested, a copy of all comments, including names and addresses, will be made available to the public.**

Comments:

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From:

Place Postage Here

TO: Cadillac-Manistee Ranger District
Huron-Manistee National Forests
412 Red Apple Road
Manistee, MI 49660

Attention: Patty O'Connell